NEWS BY CARA DEGETTE

Pressing for Freedom

Rights of student journalists at heart of *Lever* debate

the lever

est. 1887

"Give me a place to stand and I will move the Earth." –Archimedes

Finding true love

Gay teens search for a place

WHEN MARY MARGARET NUSSBAUM WROTE HER NOW INFAMOUS Palmer High School *Lever* newspaper article chronicling the difficulties that some students face growing up gay, she knew the subject was a sensitive one, especially in Colorado Springs.

But what Nussbaum didn't anticipate was the frenzy that followed: complaints from Colorado for Family Values Chairman Will Perkins, a packed school board meeting filled with gay-sympathetic teenagers and adults, and the media coverage that accompanied the whole affair.

Nussbaum was too busy interviewing people, analyzing data, and writing to dissect the implications of the Oct. 24 article, which discussed the difficulties young gays and lesbians encounter without advocating or condemning homosexuality.

In other words, she was just doing her job — a job that is unequivocally protected by state law.

Now, her right to do that job is being challenged by Colorado Springs District 11's Board of Education and its lawyer, who may tonight (Nov. 20) consider a policy that appears to violate that law.

The insane asylum

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1988 that school-funded student publications could be censored with "reasonable justifications." However, in 1990, responding directly to the Supreme Court ruling, Colorado lawmakers in effect rejected the right of adults to censor students, making the state one of six that extends press freedom from censorship to high school publications.

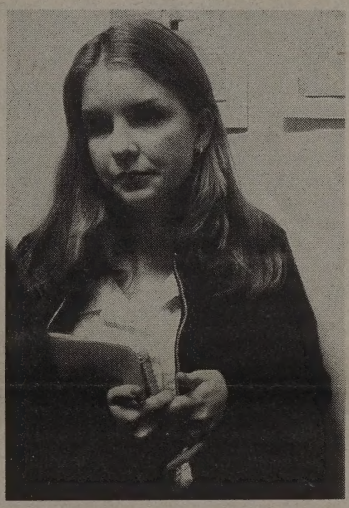
The bill was sponsored by state Sen. Pat Pascoe, who said she became concerned after several high school advisors and editors complained that their principals and school boards were increasingly censoring their newspapers after the 1988 court decision.

One high school advisor from Broomfield complained that the first thing his principal did was to censor the word "censor" from a news story about the high court ruling, Pascoe said. The principal then began censoring sentences, then paragraphs, from newspaper stories, and finally scrapped an entire "con" side to a pro and con article on study halls. The newspaper ran a big white space in its place, with the statement that "this has been censored."

Interestingly, Pascoe's legislation was criticized by some publications, including *The Denver Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News*, which editorialized against the measure.

"One said [something] to the effect that letting students control their newspapers is tantamount to letting the inmates control the insane asylum," she said.

The lawmaker later received an award for her efforts from the state chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), of which she is a member.



Palmer Lever editor Mary Margaret Nussbaum's article on gay teens triggered fierce debate about the proper parameters of student journalism.

Photo by Cara DeGette

A civilized social order

In Colorado, student journalists are assured by law the right to decide what is news and how to report it. They are, however, required to follow the same guidelines generally outlined by the SPJ: no obscenity, libel, slander, advocating unlawful acts or knowingly writing untruths.

The policy currently being considered by D-11 board members would allow newspaper advisors to censor student newspaper stories if they advocate any views that might be perceived as "inconsistent with the shared values of a civilized social order," or when a student's article might associate the school with "any position other than neutrality on matters of political controversy or other controversial or sensitive subjects."

Pascoe termed D-11's efforts to restrict students' political and social commentary a violation of state law, at best. "What happens under those conditions is the paper becomes a public relations sheet for the principal or the school district, and [that] takes all life out of it," she said. "Imagine how boring that would be."

Pascoe also pointed out that because Nussbaum's article — and an editorial supporting same-sex marriage that ran in the same *Lever* — address a politically hot topic, the students' right to free speech is even more protected. Journalists are enabled by law to write more freely about politicians and political issues than about private individuals. "The same-sex issue is very political," Pascoe said. "We just dealt with it in the legislature."

However, D-11 attorney Steve Gaines, who drafted the new policy, said last week he believed his proposal is legally sound. Still, he expects the school board — which he described as "completely wide open" — will thoroughly review it. "They're trying to come up with a policy that is the right policy," he said.

Representatives from the Washington, D.C.-based Student Press Law Center warn that any student free-speech restrictions will result in a court battle. "What they're doing at Palmer is saying, 'We don't care what state law says; we are going to ignore that and restrict our students' ability to free speech,'" said SPLC attorney Michael Hiestand. "Well, they can't.

"And if they persist in this, we will be more than happy to find [the students] an attorney and get this overturned, which we believe would be easy."

Both sides

This isn't the first time the Palmer *Lever* has brushed up against controversy. However, controversy is often a sign of journalistic courage, and the *Lever* has the awards to show for its coverage. Over the past three years, the newspaper has received several international awards for excellence, including the prestigious Quill and Scroll George H. Gallup Award.

But after Nussbaum's article appeared, D-11 school board members made clear their feelings that homosexuality is an inappropriate topic for high school journalists.

The controversy began when CFV's Perkins complained to Palmer Principal Jay Engeln and said he planned to take his complaints before the school board. Perkins, however, did not attend the Nov. 6 board meeting and has since taken a low-profile position.

However, the local gay and lesbian organization Ground Zero mobilized and packed the board meeting with supporters. Many offered testimonials to the difficulties that gay teenagers face; many leveled criticism at board president S. Kent Olvey's published statements that student newspapers should reflect the "Judeo-Christian heterosexual standards of the community."

Several school board members said they support some restrictions on what students are allowed to write about. Board member Art Nutter said he was "dismayed" by the *Lever* article and said he found the topic unsuitable. "Minors do not have the same level of freedom of speech [as adults]," Nutter said. "I'd like to see football team and swim team articles, OK?"

Barely disguising his criticism of the *Lever* article, D-11 board member Lyman Kaiser said students and their advisors should represent "both sides" of an issue and not attempt to "indoctrinate" anyone. Kaiser did not detail what "side" he felt was missing from Nussbaum's article.

But Tim Stump, a Colorado High School Press Association board member who attended the meeting, said he was disturbed by attempts to require students to include all sides of any controversial issue. He wondered, for example, whether a student covering a story about drug use would be required to include a pro-drug position under the proposed guidelines.

"They were trying to specifically outline what the student should and shouldn't be able to do," Stump said. "They are asking for trouble."

The D-11 school board will discuss the proposed policy during its regular meeting at 7 p.m. today (Nov. 20) at the administration office, 1115 N. El Paso St. No formal action is expected.

Letters

WE LOVE LETTERS.

All letters must include the author's full name and daytime telephone number for verification.
WRITE: Editor, *The Independent*, 121 E. Pikes Peak Ave., #455, Colorado Springs, CO 80903
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Bi-polar brewing

To the Editor:

I find it hilarious that reporter Cara DeGette ("Political Prophet," *Independent*, Nov. 13-19) accuses Holly and Jeffery H. Coors of intimate connection "to a conservative and ultra-secretive group, the Council for National Policy (CNP)"!

She says their family has "long been the source of funding for ultra-conservative causes." This is the same family that underwrote *Someone You Know* (a publication by Ground Zero) in the very same paper. Perhaps Coors is "bi-political" or "searching for a place" like some teens.

I don't think so! Ms. DeGette's conspiracy theories are for the birds! Let us know the truth, so we'll know whether to buy their beer or not.

— George Desautels
Colorado Springs

Looking a gift home in the mouth

To the Editor:

Leave it to the *Independent* to put a negative spin on a community event that benefits all involved ("Developer finds giving is also receiving," Nov. 13-19).

Meyers Homes and Keller Homes give a $117,000 house to the Harrison School District, and everyone from parents to the governor applauds the donation. But Malcolm Howard decides that the developers' motives aren't pure enough, because the donation will help pay for a family center that is close to some of the new homes in the district. Without substantiation, Mr. Howard guesses that each of the 450 new homes will increase in value by $2,000 to $5,000.

Mr. Howard also alleges that "it may be local taxpayers who ultimately support the profits of private builders." No back-up is given for this nonsensical statement either, because — surprise! — there isn't any. The school and family center were already there when Meyers and Keller gave away the house and would have been built in any case. Clearly, their gift saved district taxpayers $117,000, instead of costing them money as Mr. Howard states.

The builders had no obligation to make this donation. Developers already set aside land for parks and schools. Meyers and Keller went a step further and donated a house. They deserve a pat on the back, not a kick in the ass. A public apology, and a promise to get the facts straight in the future, would go a long way toward restoring your credibility.

— David R. Sellon II, president
Sellon Communities Inc.

Spare us your apology

To the Editor:

Apparently, being Christian is always having to say you're sorry.

Thomas Platt in his condescending article ("A Christian Apology," *Independent*, Nov. 13-19) refers to the same "Scriptures" which were used by Americans to defend slavery, the disenfranchisement of women and even child abuse.

He now infers that, while Christians will tolerate gays, infidels and others not of his belief, they are clearly second-class individuals. As he "reads the Bible, homosexuality is not the worst or biggest sin!" What bible is he reading? I read that it is clearly his god's order that blood should be shed for this offense and many others, including questioning the existence of his "jealous god." And the New Testament writers upheld "every jot and tittle" of those ancient platitudes.

As for "Christian ethics," there were many viable secular codes of conduct long before the fanciful Moses-stone tablet myth. For instance, the Hammurabi Code (circa 2000 B.C.) is a remarkable written social order, from which the Ten Commandments were plagiarized almost word for word.

Apologies from religionists with beliefs emanating from superstition and ignorance will simply not do. Real unity will never exist until all people on the planet stop fighting over whose god is real.

None of them are! The only social progress humankind has ever made was painfully wrested from the majority by a few enlightened freethinkers while religionists stood by with roadblocks and eventual apologies.

— Dean Morgan
Colorado Springs

Brave Brave

To the Editor:

The *Independent* and author Ralph Brave are brave indeed for your exposé "Living Under the Sign of Prozac" in the Nov. 6-12 issue. The extent to which antidepressants are prescribed and gobbled down amounts to a legalized addiction not so different from the addictive use of crack cocaine, heroin, alcohol or tobacco. Only we don't call it drug addiction; we call it medication. It's a society-sanctioned lie that makes it impossible to even talk about the roots of the epidemic of depression sweeping North America, because the drug hides the symptoms.

"Why are there so many depressed people?" asks author Brave in his article. That's a key line in the story. Why have we defecated in our nest? There are many answers, and the daily news is full of band-aid responses. But the deeper answers have to do with values, beliefs, attitudes and the very way we face the world — our world view.

We are depressed because of a belief in Dominion — the way we dominate and control nature; because of our arrogant cultural superiority; because of the value placed on ruthless competition in the economic system; because of runaway "progress," male dominance; excessive individuality; and yes, what amounts to a worship of science and technology. I didn't say any of these values should be done away with. But they must be brought back into balance, because the roots of the depression epidemic, and addiction to antidepressant drugs, lie in these seven deadly values.

For most people, there's virtually no choice but to succumb to antidepressants once you're badly depressed. I don't blame or judge. I've been over the edge myself. But before it gets that bad, while you still have some options, FIGHT BACK. Take a hard look at your lifestyle, and be willing to change your life to follow your heart to your own wellness. Pay a lot of attention to diet and to natural, outdoor exercise. Look into the energetic healing arts, like acupuncture and herbal therapies, before you take the lazy way to the pharmacy. Discover and live your own spirituality. Work for community. Question and resist inappropriate use of technology. Before you're too depressed, FIGHT BACK!

The widespread use of antidepressants is a warning and a message — for ourselves, and for our children's children's children. Thanks for your article, Ralph Brave.

— Richard Simonelli
Colorado Springs

Missing Mario

To the Editor:

On Nov. 6, Mario Savio died in Sebastopol, Calif. He was 53.

The world barely noted his passing, but Mario Savio was one of the great radicals of the 1960s. While he was a student at the University of California-Berkeley, he started a movement against the Vietnam War which included tactics like the "sit-in" and the campus strike. The Berkeley protests became a model for protests against the Vietnam War across the country.

There are two really remarkable things about Mario Savio and those Berkeley protests. One is that they started on Dec. 2, 1964, when Mr. Savio gave a particularly incendiary speech from Sproul Plaza in front of Berkeley's main administration building. The United States was just beginning to send combat units to South Vietnam and bombing planes to North Vietnam. Few people outside the State Department and the Pentagon knew or cared about this escalation. It was, after all, the age of great complacency in the United States. But, even that early, the ever-nagging, ever-terrifying prospect of an illegal and immoral war was apparent because of the crusade of Mario Savio.

The second remarkable thing about those early anti-war protests at Berkeley is that they were not dominated by students. The protesters ranged from a variety of socialists and intellectuals to Goldwater Republicans.

Mr. Savio paid the price for his leadership. He was kicked out of Berkeley. He went to jail for four months. He spent the next couple of decades out of the limelight, mostly working as a bookstore clerk, tending bar and teaching mathematics as a tutor to junior high school and high school kids. Only much later, in 1984, did he finish his bachelor's degree at San Francisco State University.

I'll miss Mario Savio. Despite a lot of lip service to love and peace and truth, my generation mainly stayed in college and went on to become yuppie consumers and heirs to our parents' middle-class values (or lack of values, as the case may be). Back then, we prided ourselves on our activism, but today most of us are fat cats somewhere.

I'll miss Mario Savio's oratory fire. I'll miss

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